

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN GLASGOW'S PARKS

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Some of Glasgow's finest parks were originally private estates and were acquired by, or gifted to, the old Glasgow Corporation in the 1800s and early 1900s. There are formal flowerbeds, shrubberies, rockeries and recreation areas for tennis, bowling and other pursuits. Often there are also park ponds, either 'duck ponds' or more usually steep-sided, concrete boating ponds which until recently were used for both rowing boats and for model yachts. The boating has now stopped in most parks but model yachting is still popular. In the summer months ninety percent of Glasgow's residents use their local park for all sorts of activities ranging from jogging and golf through to the more gentle choice of walking the dog. Why then is there a need for a Conservation Section working for the City Council in the city's parks and other open spaces?

The Conservation Section aims to protect the wildlife that already inhabits our city and to encourage more wildlife by enhancing habitats and where possible creating new ones. Glasgow's parks and open spaces, owned and managed by Glasgow City Council, provide vital pockets of green in amongst the urban sprawl. Wildlife corridors such as rivers, burns, disused railway lines and even roadside verges link these pockets and so allow the movement of animals and plants throughout the city. The presence of wild animals and plants in our midst brings pleasure to all sorts of people and increases their enjoyment of their local park environment.

A flowering meadow in summer can be a riot of colour with the yellow of Cat's Ear and Meadow Buttercup, the pink of Ragged Robin, the mauve of Devil's-bit Scabious and the pure white of Sneezewort. The flowers attract butterflies which add to the rainbow effect, and bees and other insects which also feed in the meadow. The Conservation Section is involved in creating and enhancing wildflower meadows in the parks. In Queen's Park and other suitable parks, areas of grassland have simply been left long to allow the grasses and other flowering plants to flower and set seed. At Hogganfield Park school children have planted Bluebells and Primroses in the woodland, in conjunction with the Kelvin Valley Countryside Project. Wildflower seedlings have also been planted in the grasslands at Hogganfield Park in two areas in Cranhill Park. In other areas meadows are created from scratch by preparing a piece of ground and seeding it with a wildflower seed mix, for example at Robroyston Park where a large area in the north of the park has been seeded, and again at Cranhill Park where an annual meadow mix of Corn Poppy, Cornflower, Corncockle and Corn Marigold planted by local children (in conjunction with the Parks Development Officer and the Kelvin Valley Project) produced an amazing show of colour last year and was featured in local newspaper reports. The results not only create habitat for insects but also for small mammals like the Field Vole which forms runs and nests in the

grasses, and in the autumn the seedheads are food for small birds.

Wetland creation is also a vital part of the Conservation work taking place in the parks. The loss of wetland areas throughout Britain is a continuing trend due to draining, pollution, infilling and development of land for housing and retail use. This loss of ponds and associated wetlands must, at least partly, be responsible for the decline of our native amphibians which echoes a worldwide trend of amphibian decline. Ponds and wetlands at their best are an extremely rich ecosystem of invertebrates, amphibians, birds and other animals, along with complex communities of wetland plants. One of our most attractive mammals, the Water Vole, which lives on the banks of slow-flowing rivers has been greatly affected by dredging, removal of riverside vegetation and other current management practices for 'river improvements' leading to a drastic reduction in numbers throughout Britain.

Glasgow's Victorian boating and duck ponds have great potential for development as more natural waterbodies in appropriate park settings. In Springburn Park, for example, one of the ponds has been enlarged so that the water level lies above the concrete edge, on soft mud which encourages wildfowl to use it. The new edges of the pond have been planted with a variety of native wetland plants. The naturalized appearance of the pond benefits wildlife and importantly also adds a new dimension of interest to any walk in the park. Responses from members of the public have been very favourable. At Hogganfield Park a new area of open water has recently been dug in the marshy grassland in the east of the park to provide an additional habitat for wildfowl and a breeding habitat for the Common Frog which is known to hibernate in the grassland. At Robroyston Park two clumps of trees have been removed and five new shallow ponds dug in their place, to recreate an original wetland area which was drying out due to the treeplanting. In its first year the new wetland area has attracted Canada Geese, Mallard, Little Grebe, Coot and Lapwing. Glasgow is lucky in having at least two park sites where Water Voles live and hopefully with sensitive management of their wetland habitat it will be possible to maintain their populations and perhaps, through developing and linking wildlife areas, even increase their numbers.

One of the Conservation Section's most important tasks is to monitor the animal and plant species present in the different parks and open spaces in the city. This includes monitoring Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC for short) which are areas of land anywhere within the city boundaries which have been identified as being of conservation interest by Glasgow City Council. Some of the sites belong to the City Council and some of them are in private ownership. By mon-

itoring the parks and SINC's the number and diversity of species on each site can be recorded and any changes quickly detected. Conservation management plans can thus take into consideration any species of particular note and protect them.

Working in Conservation in an urban setting brings its own unique problems. People-pressure on well-used sites can cause disturbance to wildlife and damage to habitats, unfortunately degrading the very nature of the area to which people are attracted. The solution can often be found by involving the area's user-groups in the care of the site. Parties of school children and community groups help in 'clean-ups', getting rid of the rubbish in their local patch and planting trees and wild-flowers as part of activities arranged in conjunction with various conservation bodies, including those funded or part-funded by Glasgow City Council. The Conservation Section promotes environmental education through leaflets and through liaison with others such as the Parks Development Officer and the River Valleys Projects which undertake a great deal of practical conservation work with different groups of people. School pupils out planting young trees often feel quite protective of 'their' trees and continue to visit them and watch them grow. If this appreciation of living things can be expanded and prolonged into a life long interest then the future will be bright for Glasgow's wildlife.

The highly publicised Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 has made the public very aware of 'The Environment' and 'Green Issues' which hopefully will increase public concern over the decline of habitats and species. The British Government signed the 'Convention on Biological Diversity' at the summit and subsequently produced the UK Biodiversity Action Plan which has as its goal 'to conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms'. Glasgow City Council has set up its own Biodiversity Action Plan working group to look at the status of animal and plant species within the City boundaries. The varied work of the Conservation Section within the City Council can thus contribute in some small way to national and international objectives for nature conservation, whilst at a local level help to ensure that the sight of Foxes, Kingfishers and Kestrels in the city remains a common one.

Editor's note

Carol Aitken is Assistant Conservation Officer in the Parks and Recreation Department. The value of parks to wildlife is further demonstrated in this issue by the Botanic Gardens wildlife survey reports.